



# JOHNSONIAN NEWS LETTER

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## ANOTHER HISTORY OF LITERARY CRITICISM

During conservative periods of consolidation following major political and aesthetic upheavals, one may expect a rash of books on criticism. For a time there is a compulsion to re-assess what has happened and to bring it into general perspective, rather than to pioneer in new fields. After the Puritan revolution in the seventeenth century came Dryden, Rymer, Dennis and Samuel Johnson. Now after the Marxist and Freudian outbursts, the symbolists and the myth-makers, there is again a need to take stock. We must evaluate the gains and losses, and set them in their proper historical framework.

So we have our modern Dryden, T.S. Eliot, working cautiously but persistently towards new understandings and new aesthetic standards. And we have our own American scholar-critics who are attempting wider and more comprehensive surveys. We won't say which one is the modern Dennis, or which the Johnson. After all, "comparisons are odious." But they are serving for our day the functions of those writers in the 18th century who were more eager to evaluate and judge literature than to send it off on further tangents.

The first volume of René Wellek's History of Modern Criticism was reviewed in our Sept. 1955 issue. Now his colleagues, Bill Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks, have attempted to cover more ground in a smaller compass. Their Literary Criticism: a Short History (Knopf), personal yet well balanced, is a major contribution to twentieth-century studies of literature.

On the title-page the collaborators get equal billing, but in range and bulk Wimsatt's is the greater contribution. He is responsible for the historical survey of critics from Socrates to

Croce and for the final summing up, about 580 pages in all; while Brooks handles the modern approaches by categories -- symbolism, tension, semantics, impersonality in art, myth and archetype -- in some 165 pages. But here again there should be no invidious comparisons, for it is obvious that each one was vitally concerned with the work of the other, and both parts are equally distinguished. Nevertheless, it is with Wimsatt's historical survey that we are most involved, and it is easily one of his finest achievements. Included are over 150 pages devoted to the period from Dryden to Johnson, and it is an admirable discussion of the main problems.

Of course, the approach is personal. This is "Wimsatt on the Augustan Critics." But we see no reason to object, for pure objectivity in criticism is as impossible as it would be dull. What we have, as in the work of Dr. Johnson, is a powerful mind working on the problems of literature and criticism. And the result is exhilarating and provocative. This, we will say, is something to chew and digest, not merely to taste. For us the sections devoted to the early eighteenth century seem particularly good, for Wimsatt is clearly aware that in the Age of Pope there was a strange lag between poetry and theory. The former remained far more rich and complicated than neoclassical theory would allow.

Naturally we have a few minor quibbles. If we did not we would wonder what was wrong. As a professed Johnsonian (and so is Wimsatt, and a good one), we can't help protesting the remark on page 325 that Johnson's ear "seems to have been open only to the couplet." While it is undoubtedly true that Johnson's specific praise is usually given to rhymed passages, it must be remembered that the six lines from Congreve's Mourning Bride, which he claimed was the "finest poetical passage he had ever read," and that included Shakespeare, were in blank verse. And his encomiums on Paradise Lost and Dryden's Killigrew Ode show that he could appreciate other rhythms. But this is merely a minor squabble among Johnson admirers. Don't think that Wimsatt admits he is wrong, though he would settle for "mainly to the couplet." As he points out, Johnson does not specifically praise the meter of the Congreve passage. For beauty of language and verse Johnson does turn to Pope.



## THE MODERN RESEARCHER

No one can claim that there has been any lack of basic manuals for research. But none of them has been satisfactory for advanced students entering the field of serious historical investigation. Now at last there is a book which answers all our requirements, one that not only describes the mechanical details, but also discusses the fundamental intellectual problems which lie behind the various techniques. The Modern Researcher by Jacques Barzun and Henry F. Graff (Harcourt, Brace and Co.) appears to us to be a perfect job. All of us can learn from it; and our students should devour it from cover to cover.

The usual technical details, of course, are there: Advice on authorities, the use of bibliographical tools, proper footnoting, methods of revision. There are sensible remarks on style and composition. But what is far more important, there are searching discussions of the meaning of history, the proper handling of ideas, the search for truth, and the fundamental meaning of causation. We are given summaries of the systems developed by historians in the past, with analyses of the patterns and biases behind each position. There is valuable advice about the search for evidence, buttressed by examples of actual problems and their solution. The latter part of the book is devoted to matters of writing -- organization, the avoidance of jargon, emphasis, the use of quotations and paraphrase. Throughout the approach is fresh and stimulating. Certainly this is no run-of-the-mill reference work.

What we like best of all about the book is the illuminating explanation of the philosophy of research, with its emphasis on the skeptical need for verification, for the careful sifting of truth from error, and with its description of the methods of dating and ascription of authorship. For every one of us who is involved in advising advanced students, this book should prove a God-send.

## MISCELLANEOUS NEWS ITEMS

This spring George Sherburn was given a D. Litt. degree by Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. Sherburn is now in England working on some newly-available letters of Pope and Sir William Trumbell. Others of our subscribers who are in England this summer are Clarence Tracy, working on Johnson's life of Savage; Neilson C.

Hannay, still struggling with Cowper's letters, and Sam Monk, to name only a few.

Now that Gordon Ray is Provost of the University of Illinois, Bob Rogers is Chairman of the English Department. Rea Keast is now Chairman of the Department at Cornell.

Irvin Ehrenpreis (Indiana) has completed a short book called The Personality of Jonathan Swift, which will be published by Methuen next spring. This is not to be confused with his extensive life of Swift, which is also near completion.

Routledge, Kegan Paul in England and the Columbia University Press in New York are publishing a full critical edition of Burke's Sublime and Beautiful, prepared by James Boulton of the University of Nottingham.

We hear that James Sutherland has sent two series of lectures to press, the Clark and Alexander lectures. We await them with eagerness.

Lillian de la Torre (Mrs. George McCue) has written a life of Sarah Siddons for Nelson's series of biographies for teen-age girls. It will be published in the fall. Since there is no scholarly study of the great actress to rely on, Lillian de la Torre has been forced to consult much rare material, some in manuscript, even for this popular children's version.

A selection from Boswell's Life of Johnson, entitled Boswell's Johnson Sampler, has been issued as a 35¢ paper-back by the Fawcett Publications. There is a very short Preface by Archibald Marshall, but no index or other apparatus except some biographical notes at the back.

Our readers may be interested to hear of a modern oil portrait of Johnson, painted from the Ozias Humphrey drawing by the artist William Combe of Washington, D.C. It has been executed for Paul S. Watson, Curator of Astronomy at the Maryland Academy of Sciences in Baltimore. Watson writes that he thinks the artist has really captured "the large brooding majesty of Johnson's face in repose," as Jack Bate puts it. Color slides are being made, and we hope soon to judge for ourselves. In preparing for the painting,



Watson has taken great care to find out the exact color of Johnson's eyes and hair. On the advice of Fritz Liebert the eyes were made light blue-grey. In order to ascertain the color of the hair, Dr. J.E. Hurst in Lichfield carefully examined two specimens in the Birthplace Museum. Though heavily tinged with grey, the hair which has been preserved is definitely a medium brown. So that much seems to have been established, if anything can ever be definitely settled.

We hear that on July 20 the Johnson Club held its summer meeting at Worcester College, Oxford. Sir Harold Williams presided, and some twenty-five to thirty members and their guests attended. George Sherburn, one of the latter, has written appreciatively of the delightful evening, but we hope soon to have a fuller account from L.F. Powell.

We are very glad to pass on a plea, recently received, for aid in repairs to Lichfield Cathedral in Staffordshire. The timbers of the roof are in desperate straits, as a result of the inroads of the death-watch beetle, and repairs are badly needed on the external masonry. Now the Dean has launched an appeal for help in making these repairs and for other pressing needs of the Cathedral, where Johnson is so well remembered. Any contribution, no matter how small, we know will be gratefully received.

We have been distressed to hear that A. Lloyd-Jones has been forced by ill health to resign as Treasurer of the London Johnson Society. His place has been taken by E.M. Bonner, whose address is 74c Belsize Park Gardens, London N.W. 3. Lloyd-Jones is now in the Carlton Nursing Home, 1 Carlton Rd., Ealing, London W. 5. We were further distressed to hear that it was possible that the society would be forced because of financial reasons to give up their little publication, *The New Rambler*; but the last word is that efforts are being made to continue the periodical. We hope the attempts are successful.

This spring eighteenth-century studies lost one of its most valuable adherents in the sudden death of Arthur Secord (Illinois). It is sad to think that we will not see him at M.L.A. meetings, or receive any more of his pungent letters of news. He will be greatly missed. We hope his important researches on Defoe and early fiction will be carried on by someone else at Urbana.

Henry Pettit (Colorado) suggests that we mention an interesting article which many of you may have missed: Tatsumosuke Ueda, "'Japan' in Some English Works of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries" in The Rising Generation (Tokyo), for November 1, 1955. The author concludes "I am particularly impressed by one thing, viz. the vigorous, outreaching world-mindedness of the Englishmen of the Augustan Age."

Rex Cochrane has written about the status of the re-editing of Pepys' diary. Perhaps someone can give us further details. Braybrooke's edition is reputed to contain less than thirty percent of the manuscript. Since 1930 F. McD. C. Turner has been transcribing the text, and we understand has now completed the job. The annotation, however, is being assembled by others. Whether there will still be any expurgation, or how much, is still not clear. We hope that finally there may be a complete edition of the diary.

We hope you saw Kingsley Amis's piece in the Sunday New York Times book section of July 7, where he predicts that "we are in for a golden age of satire." Our culture, he insists, needs the savage laughter of men like Swift and Fielding, and his whole essay is almost a plea for a return to 18th-century literary aims. Then Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. in the magazine section of the Times for August 4, when discussing the future of liberal thought in this country, insists that what we now need is "a rebirth of satire, of dissent, of irreverence, of an uncompromising insistence that phoniness is phony and platitudes are platitudinous." In other words we need a Swift. We need a modern Pope and a Gay. The question is: Are they being grown somewhere in our schools?

#### GUGGENHEIM FELLOWSHIPS

The eighteenth century is well represented in the list of Guggenheim fellowships for next year. The following are definitely concerned with this period, or will probably have something to do with it: Meyer H. Abrams, "A Study of the Role of Metaphor and Analogy in Western Thought"; John L. Clive, "A Study of the Transition from 18th to 19th-Century Thought and Opinion in England"; T.C. Duncan Eaves, "Studies of the Life and Works of Samuel Richardson"; Durand Echeverria, "A Study of the Meaning of Liberty in French Thought of the 18th Century"; John J. Enck, "Studies of Restoration Comedy"; Arthur Friedman, "Studies of the



Works of Oliver Goldsmith"; Donald J. Greene, "Studies in the Relations between English Literature and Politics in the 18th Century"; Oscar A. Haac, "Studies of the French Novel of the 18th Century"; J. Jean Hecht, "A Study of the Upper Class Family in 18th Century England"; Benjamin B. Hoover, "Studies in the Relationship of Literature and Politics in 18th-century England"; Wilbur S. Howell, "A Study of the Theories of Logic and Rhetoric in 18th-century England"; Frank H. Manuel, "Studies of Mythology and Primitive Religion in 18th-century Thought"; William B. Peach, "Studies on Richard Price and British Moral Philosophy"; Martin Price, "A Study of Order in 18th-century English Writers"; Robert W. Rogers, "A Biographical Study of Alexander Pope"; John C. Stephens, Jr., "Studies of Richard Steele and Joseph Addison as Editors of The Guardian."

### SOME NEW BOOKS

This year's Rede Lecture at Cambridge University was delivered by R. W. Ketton-Cremer, his topic "Matthew Prior." It has now been published by the Cambridge University Press as a little pamphlet selling for 75¢. This is a delightful appreciation of Matt and his verses, which we feel sure you will all enjoy."

The latest in the British Council two shilling series of Writers and Their Works is Edmund Burke by T.E. Utley. Included is a useful short bibliography.

Martin K. Nurmi in Blake's Marriage of Heaven and Hell: A Critical Study (Kent State University Bulletin, April 1957) provides a detailed exegesis of the meaning and form of Blake's widely admired work. In it, says Nurmi, "we see Blake at a crucial stage of his development, announcing, in the exultant mood of a man who has at last grasped a long-sought truth, the revolutionary philosophical bases of the apocalypse he saw augured in the American and French revolutions." In structure, Nurmi suggests, in the way in which its themes recur, the piece resembles the rondo in music.

Although ostensibly lying outside our period, Dick Altick's The English Common Reader: a Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800-1900 (Univ. of Chicago Press) should be mentioned, since in the introductory chapters there is an admirable summary of condi-

tions in the eighteenth century. The whole book contains a mass of valuable information presented in an interesting way.

The new Everyman edition of Alexander Pope's Collected Poems, edited by Bonamy Dobrée, contains in some 426 pages everything of Pope's except the Homer. A number of verses are included from the new Twickenham volumes.

Robert D. Thornton's The Tuneful Flame: Songs of Robert Burns as He Sang Them (Univ. of Kansas Press) is a handsome volume of 74 pages, giving simple musical arrangements for the songs.

The Scottish Text Society has now published the second and final volume of The Poems of Robert Fergusson, edited by M.P. McDiarmid. The work contains poems, notes, and glossary, and is the first real editing of this material since early in the nineteenth century. There are three poems on Johnson. We owe this information to William Gillis.

Other new books to be mentioned are: Maurice Cranston, John Locke (Longmans); Lacy Lockert, The Chief Rivals of Corneille and Racine (Vanderbilt University Press); E.J. Dobson, English Pronunciation 1500-1700 (O.U.P.); Robert Gore-Brown, Gay Was the Pit: the Life and Times of Anne Oldfield (Reinhardt).

#### AN EARLY ALLUSION TO SAMUEL JOHNSON?

From J.R. Moore (Indiana) comes the following: "On October 18, 1744, the Dowager Duchess of Marlborough died. In a tract dated 'London, 1745' (which according to the frequent practice of pamphlet publishers might perhaps have been postdated from the latter part of 1744) the formidable Duchess was represented as conversing in the spirit world with her old patroness Queen Anne (Mrs. Morley). A Dialogue in the Shades: Between Mrs. Morley and Mrs. Freeman varied from the usual practice of such dialogues by offering a jocular explanation of its mysterious transmission to the publisher (p.3):

'Some Persons may perhaps be curious enough to ask how we could come by the following Intelligence, and how the Minutes of the Dialogue contained in these Sheets could be transmitted to us? To all such tender Innocents and busy Searchers, be it known,



that even in the B--t-sh S--te (the Avenues to which are much more narrowly watch'd than the Elysian Shades) no Speech or Debate of any Consequence can pass, but some petty Clerk in Office will for a proper Consideration communicate it to the Public, and where that cannot be obtain'd the pretty ingenious Gentleman at St. John's Gate will constitute the Hurgoes and the Quadrits, and make Speeches for them.'

"Was Johnson referred to here as 'the pretty Gentleman at St. John's Gate'? He had probably ceased to write Cave's Parliamentary Debates in March, 1744; but after that date the series had been largely discontinued, and there had been no notable successor to Johnson. If the pamphleteer had any one author in mind, Johnson was almost certainly the man. Did the description of the author of the Parliamentary Debates as 'pretty' indicate that the pamphleteer had never seen Johnson, or was it meant as one of the many slurs at his grotesque appearance?"

#### SOME RECENT ARTICLES

There is an appreciative essay "Dryden: a 'Poet's Poet'" by Frank Kermode in The Listener for May 30. Other articles to be mentioned are: John Harrington Smith, "Some Sources of Dryden's Toryism," HLQ for May; Leonard Nathanson, "Dryden, Donne, and Cowley," N&Q for May; W.J. Cameron, "John Dryden and Henry Heveningham" in the same issue; A.E. Wallace, "Dryden and Pyrrhonism," N & Q for June.

For the early eighteenth century: Arthur L. Cooke, "Addison's Aristocratic Wife," PMLA for June; Calhoun Winton, "Steele, The Junto and The Tatler, No. 4," MLN for March; Lawrence C. McHenry, Jr., "Doctors Afield: Sir Samuel Garth, Kt.," New England Journal of Medicine for April 4; Robert D. Horn, "Marlborough's First Biographer: Dr. Francis Hare," HLQ for February; David P. French, "Swift, the Non-Jurors, and Jacobitism," MLN for April; Earl R. Miner, "A Poem by Swift, and W. B. Yeats's Aristophanes' Apology," MLN for April; Mackie L. Jarrell, "Joyce's Use of Swift's Polite Conversation in the 'Circe' Episode of Ulysses," PMLA for June; Jackson I. Cope, "Shakerly Marmion and Pope's Rape of the Lock," MLN for April; Fitzroy Pyle, "Six Notes on 'The Rape of the Lock,'" N & Q for June.

For the novelists: P.D. Mundy, "The Ancestry of Daniel Defoe," N & Q for June; Spiro Peterson, "A Sonnet Not Defoe's," N & Q for May; William H. McBurney, "Mrs. Penelope Aubin and the Early Eighteenth-Century English Novel," HLQ for May; Ralph W. Rader, "Thackeray's Injustice to Fielding," JEGP for April; Alan Wendt, "Fielding and South's 'Luscious Morsel': a Last Word," N & Q for June; Claude E. Jones, "Smollett Editions in Eighteenth-Century England," N&Q for June; John H. Sutherland, "Robert Bage: Novelist of Ideas," P Q for April.

For the mid-century: Henry Pettit, "The English Rejection of Young's Night-Thoughts," Univ. of Colorado Studies for January; Cecil Price, "Six Letters by Christopher Smart," RES for May; Helmut E. Gerber, "The Clandestine Marriage and Its Hogarthian Associations," MLN for April; Clifton Cherpach, "Warburton and Some Aspects of the Search for the Primitive in Eighteenth-Century France," PQ for April; Jerome B. Landfield, "Sheridan's Maiden Speech: Indictment by Anecdote," Quart. Journal of Speech for April.

There were a number of earlier articles which were left out of the last issue, notably: Albert Rosenberg, "The Authorship of the Verses on Marlborough's Exile," N & Q for October 1956; H.M. Currie, "Chesterfield Agelastus," N & Q for October; F.H. Amphlett Mickelwright, "Frederick Augustus Hervey," N & Q for December; M.L. Perkins, "Voltaire's Principles of Political Thought," MLQ for December; J.M. Aden, "Scriptural Parody in Canto I of The Castle of Indolence," MLN for December; Hoosag K. Gregory, "The Prisoner and His Crimes: Summary Comments on a Longer Study of the Mind of William Cowper," Literature and Psychology for May 1956; David B. Green, "Three Cowper Letters," N & Q for December; Madison C. Bates, "Cowper to Hayley and Rose, June 1792: Two Unpublished Letters," W. Powell Jones, "New Light on Sir Egerton Brydges" in the same issue; Harvard Library Bulletin for Winter 1957; W. Powell Jones, "New Light on Sir Egerton Brydges" in the same issue; George B. Schick, "Appreciation of Milton as a Criterion of Eighteenth-Century Taste," N&Q for March 1957.

There are four articles on Johnson: Jacob Leed, "Samuel Johnson and the 'Gentleman's Magazine': An Adjustment of the Canon," N & Q for May, and "Two New Pieces by Johnson in the Gentleman's Magazine?" MP for May; Gwin J. Kolb, "The Address of



Dr. Johnson's Last Letter to William Windham," N & Q for May; Orszagh Laszlo, "Johnson Lexikográfiai Módszere," Filológiai Közlöny (Budapest, 1956), or something like that.

Others to be listed: Philip P. Allie, "Hume, Maine de Biran and the Meditatifs Interieurs," JHI for June; Keith Stewart, "The Ballad and the 'Genres' of the Eighteenth Century," ELH for June; R.E. Hughes, "Rhetoric and Ridicule in the Eighteenth Century," N & Q for June; A.G.E. Jones, "The Eighteenth Century Whaling Trade of Bristol," N & Q for June; Robert F. Gleckner, "Blake's Tiriel and the State of Experience," PQ for April; J.B. Price, "William Blake, the Visionary," Contemporary Review for June.

### "INIMITABLE" FALSTAFF

Warren L. Fleischauer (John Carroll Univ., Cleveland) writes: "In a recent Johnsonian News Letter, Richard Purdum of the University of Illinois raised the question as to whether Dr. Johnson did not derive his characterization of Falstaff as 'inimitable' from Sheffield's Essay upon Poetry (1682). Quite possibly he did, but, by the time that Johnson wrote his note on Henry IV, the word 'inimitable' was almost inseparably linked to the fat knight. For example, Corbyn Morris, later Boswell's friend, in his Essay on Wit (1744) refers to the 'inimitable wit of Sir John;' a writer in The Gentleman's Magazine (Oct., 1752), who signs himself only as 'P.T.,' lauds Shakespeare's 'inimitable Falstaff.' Mrs. Charlotte Lennox, for whose Shakespear Illustrated (1754) Johnson had written the 'Dedication,' mentioned 'the inimitable Humour of Falstaff.' After Johnson's apostrophe (1765), the word 'inimitable' is applied to Falstaff by Mrs. Griffith (Morality of Shakespeare, 1775) and by Joseph Baretta (1777) in his Discours sur Shakespeare et sur Monsieur de Voltaire in a literal translation of Johnson: 'Que vous dirai-je de Falstaff, de l'inimitable Falstaff . . .?' In short, Johnson's analysis of Falstaff's character is so completely traditional that it may be traced with verbal exactness in earlier criticism, as I have attempted to show in my unpublished dissertation, Dr. Johnson's Editing and Criticism of Shakespeare's Lancastrian Cycle, Western Reserve University, 1951, pp. 315-365."

### SOME JOHNSONIAN TIDBITS

Donald Greene has pointed out to us that Anna Seward (Nichols' Illustrations, VII, 324) once wrote: "Everything Johnson wrote was poetry; for the poetic essence consists not in rhyme and measure, which are only its trappings, but in that strength and glow of the fancy to which all works of art and nature stand in prompt administration; that rich harmony of period, more tunable than needs the metric powers to add more sweetness." As Greene comments, "Quite apart from the Johnsonian reference, if Coleridge had written that, it would be looked on as a great insight of criticism."

At the back of an edition of The Spectator (1799) in the Birth-place Museum in Lichfield is written in a contemporary hand: "No 558 -- Dr. Samuel Johnson used to say was the most exquisite Essay he ever read."

R.D. Spector points out the reference to Rasselas in Colin Wilson's The Outsider (p. 52). The Prince in Rasselas, says Wilson, "has expressed the Outsider's problem in a sentence." And all this in a chapter entitled "The Romantic Outsider."

In The Universal Magazine for September 1776 there is "The Astronomer: a Moral Tale," which is avowedly a variation on the astronomer chapter in Rasselas. As Bertram Davis comments, Johnsonians may be interested in it. In this version the astronomer who thinks he has control over the elements finds that when he sends a storm to heal a pestilential city, a fleet elsewhere is shipwrecked, so that the balance is always being upset. Unable to achieve a better balance by tipping the world on its axis, he asks the Lord to relieve him of his power over the elements. The Lord, pitying the weakness of human nature, graciously removes the astronomer's insanity. This conveys, says the magazine, "more important Instruction to the Mind" than does the story in Rasselas.

There is an old tradition at Lichfield that once at Stowe Hill Molly Aston challenged Johnson to a race up the long walk. After giving him a long start, she then laughed so much at his ungainly movements as he ran that quite unexpectedly he won the race with ease. How we would have liked to see that contest!